STRAINED RELATIONS

HARRY GRAHAM

STRAINED RELATIONS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

RUTHLESS RHYMES FOR HEARTLESS HOMES
BALLADS OF THE BOER WAR
MISREPRESENTATIVE MEN
FISCAL BALLADS
VERSE AND WORSE
MISREPRESENTATIVE WOMEN
DEPORTMENTAL DITTIES
CANNED CLASSICS
THE MOTLEY MUSE
RHYMES FOR RIPER YEARS
THE WORLD WE LAUGH IN

THE BOLSTER BOOK
LORD BELLINGER
THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN
THE COMPLETE SPORTSMAN
BIFFIN AND HIS CIRCLE
THE LAST OF THE BIFFINS

A GROUP OF SCOTTISH WOMEN
THE MOTHER OF PARLIAMENTS
SPLENDID FAILURES

STRAINED RELATIONS

BY

HARRY GRAHAM

AUTHOR OF "THE WORLD WE LAUGH IN,"
"DEPORTMENTAL DITTIES," ETC., ETC.

With Illustrations by H. Stuart Menzies and Hendy

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NOTE

The characters and events described in this book are purely imaginary. No reference is made, or intended, to any living person.

H. G.

STRAINED RELATIONS

I

GRANDPAPA

MY dining-room is large and light
(Twelve feet by nine, or very nearly),
And on its walls, both left and right,
" Old Masters " hang, at ev'ry height,
Where all may see them clearly :
Dangling from their respective wires,
The fam'ly portraits of my sires.

Great-uncle Charles, in gold and blue
(A second Nelson he was reckoned),
And Great-aunt Arabella, too,
Who, if what Greville says is true,
Was loved by George the Second ;

And that stout ancestor, Sir Carey,
Who made such play with Bloody Mary.

Here, too, are prints of Speaker Strouchan[1]
  Whose rulings flowed like molten lava,
Of Bertram, thirteenth Baron Bolquhoun,[2]
Of Admiral Sir Maurice Moynigan[3]
  Who fell at Balaclava,
Of Bishop Waughan,[4] that great divine—
All famous ancestors of mine.

Upon an easel, too, observe
  The portrait that so proudly stands here
Instinct in ev'ry line and curve
With all the charm, the grace, the verve

[1] Pronounced "Stroon."
[2] Pronounced "Boon."
[3] Pronounced "Moon."
[4] Pronounced "Woon."

Of good Sir Edwin Landseer,
An artist who was quite the rage
In Queen Victoria's spacious age.

No picture this of hinds at play,
Of mongrels that with mastiffs quarrel,
Of Shetland ponies munching hay,
Of Monarchs of the Glen at Bay
In marshes near Balmoral,
Or dachshunds (of the slim and wan sort)
Retrieving grouse for the Prince Consort.

This is a portrait. Here one can
Descry those purely human features
Whereby, since first the world began,
Man has with ease distinguished Man
From humbler fellow-creatures
And seldom, whatsoe'er his shape,
Mistaken him for Dog or Ape.

Inspect this subject well, and note
The whiskers centrally divided,
The silken stock about his throat,
The loose but elegant frock-coat,
The boots (elastic-sided),

And you'll at once remark : " Ah, ha !
" This must, of course, be Grandpapa ! "

'Tis he, of feudal types the last,
  By all his peers revered, respected ;
His lines in pleasant places cast
Where churls saluted as he pass'd
  And maidens genuflected,
And, if he chanced to meet the Vicar,
The latter's pulse would beat the quicker.

A model English squire, 'twas he
  Who entertained the local gentry ;
Though not himself at home for tea,
To his demesne a paltry fee
  Of sixpence gave them entry,
And through his grounds they all might pass,
Though cautioned to KEEP OFF THE GRASS.

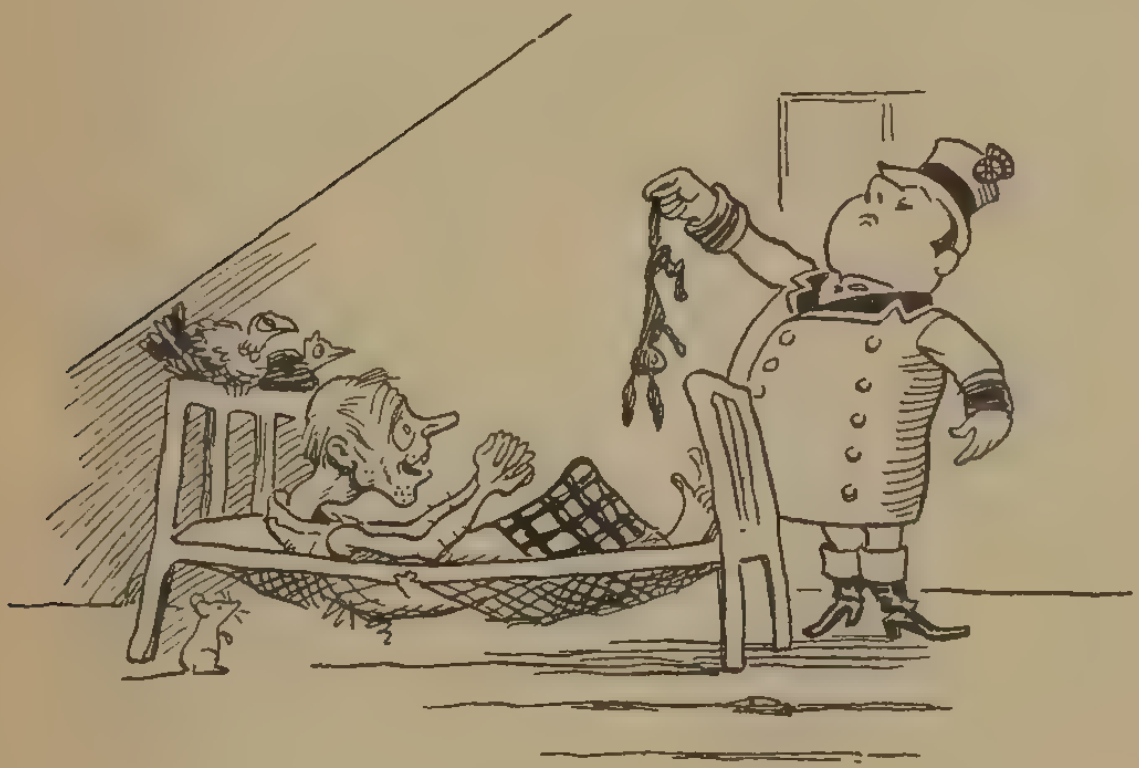
The Park was free on Saturdays.
  Here members of the lower orders
Could watch my grandsire's cattle graze
Or (through their op'ra-glasses) gaze

At his herbaceous borders.
The masses he most truly pitied,
Though BICYCLISTS were NOT ADMITTED.

As yet upon his vast estates
No labour troubles had arisen ;
There were no beggars at his gates—
He and his brother-magistrates
Had sent them all to prison,
Knowing 'twas wiser to avoid
Encouraging the Unemployed.

Though tender-hearted, I declare,
And often moved to righteous rages
When told that his own workmen were
Reduced to vegetarian fare
By their starvation wages,
Such gloomy topics he'd dismiss—
He knew there was no cure for this.

But if a villager fell sick
He'd send the invalid a rabbit ;



When lightning struck a yeoman's rick
'Twould cut him to the very quick,
He'd sigh : " Poor Farmer Crabbett !
" He'll have no fodder for his cow ;
" I'd best foreclose the mortgage now ! "

Suppose some tenant, old and bent,
By age or penury afflicted,
Failed to produce his quarter's rent,
What agony of mind it meant
To have the man evicted!
To watch each bankrupt friend depart
Would nearly break poor Grandpa's heart.

In politics it was his rule
To be broadminded but despotic;
In argument he kept quite cool,
Knowing a man to be a fool
And most unpatriotic
Who differed from the views that he
Had cherished from the age of three.

I well remember, as a child,
How much his moods perplexed and awed me;
At times irate, at others mild,
Alternately he frowned and smiled,
Would censure or applaud me,
And either pat me on the head
Or send me screaming off to bed.

If I was late for morning pray'rs
I saw dire retribution looming ;
Though stealthily I crept downstairs
And knelt and smelt the study chairs
While Grandpa's voice kept booming,
I knew I should be soundly trounced
After the Blessing was pronounced.

Once I recall—a sad affair—
When, as a child of years still tender,
I chanced to sit in *his* armchair,
He seized me roughly by the hair

And flung me in the fender.
He had such quaint impulsive ways ;
I didn't sit again for days.

Dear Grandpapa—I see him yet,
My friend, philosopher and guide, too,
A personality, once met,
One could not possibly forget,
Though lots of people tried to—
Founder of a distinguished line,
And worthy ancestor of mine !

II

GRANDMAMA

WHEN Grandmama was seventeen
And Queen Victoria was queen,
She wore a gown of bombazine
And was a famous beauty ;
She married Grandpapa (although
She much preferred another beau
Who played upon the piccolo)
Because it was her duty
And not, you may be sure, becos
She knew how very rich he was.

They spent a perfect honeymoon
At Como in the month of June ;
While Grandpa played on his bassoon
Some airs that he'd invented,

She listened with her cheeks aglow,
And shortly (in a day or so)
Forgot her jilted piccolo
And grew at last contented.

The happy pair were blessed by Fate :
They had a family of eight.

More fair each day dear Grandma grew ;
Her eyes were of the palest blue,
Her ringlets of a raven hue
  (Or so her portraits tell us) ;
When as a bride she went about
She was the toast at drum or rout—
Grandpa, who suffered from the gout,
  Became extremely jealous,
Trying to tune up his bassoon
At moments most inopportune.

* * * *

When Grandmama was thirty-three
Her life was peaceful as could be ;
With children clustered round her knee
  She'd sit and do her knitting.
She wore a black lace cap and shawl,
And hardly ever moved at all,

Though sometimes she would pay a call
(Weather, of course, permitting)
In mantle ruched with sarsenet
And bonnet trimmed with beads and jet.

With ample form so tightly laced,
A silver chatelaine at waist,
Her feet in button-boots encased,
She made a striking figure ;

And when the common people saw
Her bowling by in the landau
Their breasts were filled with wholesome awe;
  If children chanced to snigger,
They must have had some private joke—
They never laughed at gentle-folk.

Though gone the radiant bloom of youth,
As yet she'd hardly lost a tooth;
She was of riper years, in truth,
  But still her charms attracted.
Complexioned like an autumn rose
(Her portraits of that date disclose
The glossy and unpowdered nose
  That Fashion then exacted),
So elegant, though amply-curved,
And wonderfully well-preserved.

* * * *

When Grandmama was fifty-five
She suddenly became alive,
Attended ev'ry Ping-Pong Drive
  And on her bike would pedal
To play a round at Forest Row
Where, taking half a stroke or so,
She very often beat the Pro.
  And gained the Monthly Medal.
At Cowes she won, by half a lap,
The Roller-skating Handicap.

She occupied a service-flat,
She wore a saucy Trilby hat,
A tailor-made and neat cravat,
  Was always in a hurry,
With energy that knew no bounds
She kept a pack of Basset hounds
And exercised them in the grounds
  Of Grandpa's seat in Surrey.
Her raven locks were tinged with grey,
But she grew younger ev'ry day.

* * * *

When Grandmama was sixty-nine
She had acquired a taste for wine,
Wherever she was asked to dine
She criticised the claret ;

Her stories were a trifle strange
(She got them from the Stock Exchange),

On ev'ry subject she would range
And chattered like a parrot.
At Bridge so stridently she joked
That her opponents all revoked.

Though very seldom tired or ill
What kept her hale and hearty still
Was the indomitable will
With which she had been gifted.
At heart as young as ever, though
Her hair was white as driven snow,
And patches could be seen below
Whence some of it had drifted.
The Basset hounds were long since dead ;
She kept a Pekinese instead.

* * * *

When Grandmama was eighty-two
Her hair resumed its earlier hue
But with a touch of Navy blue
And copper intermingled ;
In vain her great-grandchildren raved
And said it made her look depraved,
She had it permanently waved

And, naturally, shingled,
And Lasky (or some Movie-man)
Begged her to star in " Peter Pan."

She changed her style and taste in dress,
She paid much more and wore much less,
Till there was nothing left to guess
Of what was veiled so slightly
By little frocks of crêpe Georgette
Which she would buy from Lafayette,
And, as she smoked her cigarette

And quaffed her cocktails nightly,
The leaders of the new régime
Said Grandma was a perfect scream !

* * * *

To-day, although she's eighty-four,
At night-clubs still she takes the floor
With dancing partners by the score—
You needn't deem them heroes,
For on the parquet she's so light,
And just the perfect weight and height.
I'm taking her myself to-night
To sup and dance at Ciro's !
It's fun, of course—but, I foresee,
We shan't get home till after three !

III

UNCLES

UNCLES occupy positions
Other folks can never fill,
Giving constant exhibitions
Of the breeziest goodwill,
Pressing gold or silver piece
On a nephew or a niece.

They alone of all relations
Know how sweet a kinship is
That involves no obligations,
No responsibilities:
Parents must be stern at times,
Uncles laugh at childhood's crimes!

When they've played with Mauds and Erics,
Tickled them and pinched their ears,
Worked them up into hysterics
Till they're all reduced to tears,

Uncles calmly say " Good-night ! "
Mothers have to put things right.

I recall how Uncle Stanley
  Used to pick me out of bed
And, to see if I was manly,
  Whirl me wildly round his head ;
Then, if I was sick, or worse,
Hand me quickly back to Nurse.

I remember, some years later,
  Uncle Claud (who shot Big Game)
Sent me home an alligator
  He suggested I should tame.
Father took a gloomy view
And despatched it to the Zoo.

Uncle Claud was quite the smartest
  And the bravest of his day.
He was painted by an artist
  Shooting turtles in Malay,

And a score of photographs
Prove his courage with giraffes.

None had won so many combats,
Hand to hand, with cockatoos ;

None had flushed such flights of wombats,
Or destroyed so many gnus.
Once he saw a rhino pass—
Through his telescopic glass.

* * * *

To return to Uncle Stanley :
He was quite a sportsman, too,
He'd a stalking-box at Hanley
Which was called " Asylums View,"
And would shoot clay-pigeons there,
Or (on Sundays) course a hare.

But the pastime he excelled in—
Amateur dramatic art—
Showed him quite unparalleled in
Any great Shakespearean part ;
His conception of Macbeth
Tickled ev'ry one to death.

When he first performed Othello
At the local Institute,
One unmannerly young fellow
Tried to hit him with his boot,
But the others cheered with vim
And (all three) applauded him.

Still, he only loved the drama
  Failing other forms of sport,
For he longed to snare a llama
  Or to hear a bison snort,
And in Shakespeare's plays, he knew,
These are things one cannot do.

* * * *

Uncle Sidney was another
  And a milder type of man,
Quite a contrast to his brother,
  Built upon a diff'rent plan ;
Any risk to life or limb
Was anathema to him.

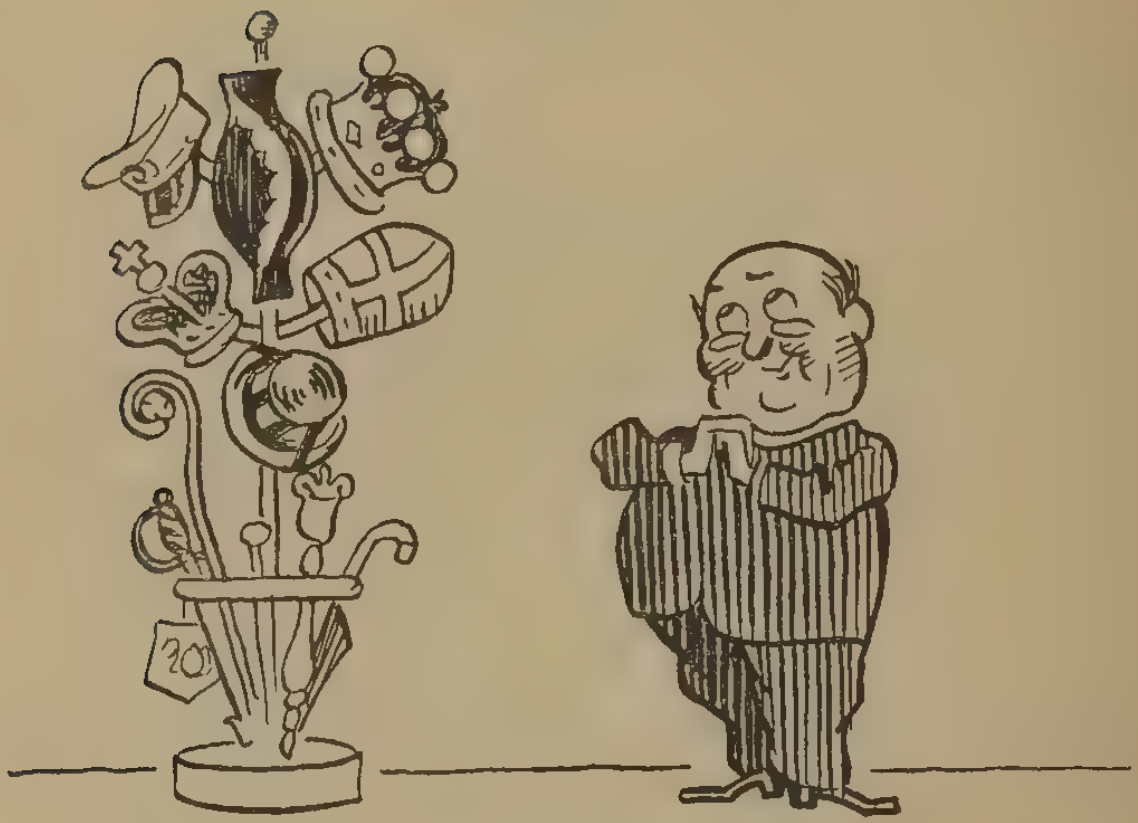
He was patient and forgiving,
  As became a parish priest,
The incumbent of a living
  At St. Beowulf's-in-the-East,
Where his influence for good
Was, alas ! misunderstood.

Hungry men who saw him leading
An apparent life of wealth
Did not realise High Feeding
Was essential to his health,
And the wine he had to take
Solely for the stomach's sake.

Folks who met him in the Season,
Visiting his cure of souls,
Often asked themselves the reason
Why he always used a Rolls.
Could he do it on his feet ?
No. He lived in Curzon Street.

He had made a prudent marriage
With the widow of a peer,
And, when preaching, would disparage
Vices common still, I fear,
In that smart exclusive set
Where he was so often met.

Nightly with my Aunt Maria
Through the Peerage he would search,
Choosing guests to meet the higher
Dignitaries of the Church.



Bishops at his groaning board
Prayed to have each dish encored.

* * * *

On mature consideration,
  Looking back at all the three,
Which avuncular relation
  Was the favourite with me
Is a ticklish problem I'd
Have some trouble to decide.

Uncle Stanley loved to harp on
  His successes on the boards ;
Uncle Claud would talk of tarpon
  Or of buffaloes in hordes ;
Heedless of the stage or sport,
Uncle Sidney sipped his port.

I may boast (without effront'ry)
  That it is such men as they
Who have made the Mother Country—
  England—what she is to-day !

So, while we can still produce
Men like these, we've some excuse.

IV

AUNTS

OF all my Aunts—and I have eight,
A varied and a choice collection—
The two I chiefly venerate
And view with most affection
Are spinsters—need I say I mean
Aunt Flora and Aunt Geraldine?

Two charming sisters, they possess
A maisonette in Earl's Court Crescent,
At which respectable address
They strive with zeal incessant
To cultivate each nobler grace
And make the world a better place.

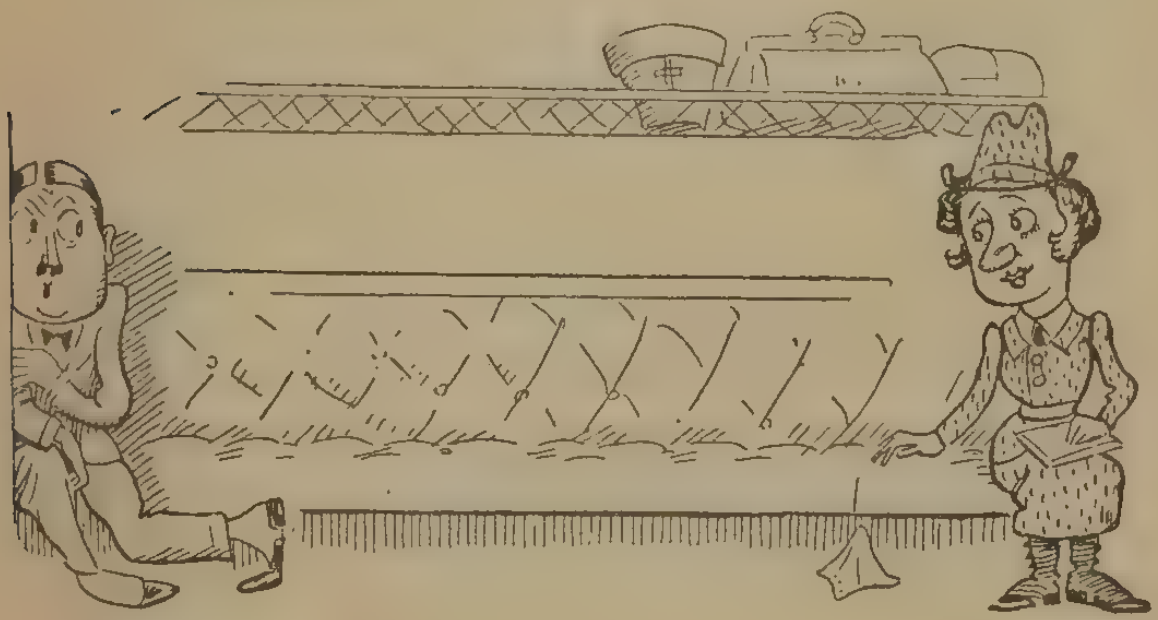
They might have married, I'm assured,
  But in their youth were too fastidious,
And later, when their charms matured,
  Men found the task invidious
Of choosing which of two to woo
When either equally would do.

But still, no loveless life was theirs ;
  With shrieks of happy girlish laughter
They'd oft discuss their heart-affairs,
  For they were much run after,

Though men are made of craven stuff
And none would run quite fast enough.

The blood would mount to Aunties' cheeks
  To think how well they could enslave men
Converting shy ones into Sheiks
  And coy ones into Cave-men.
Indeed, there scarcely passed a day
But some adventure came their way.

Once, when Aunt Flo was in a train,
  A fellow-trav'ller sat upon her !
He hurriedly got off again,
  And seemed a man of honour,



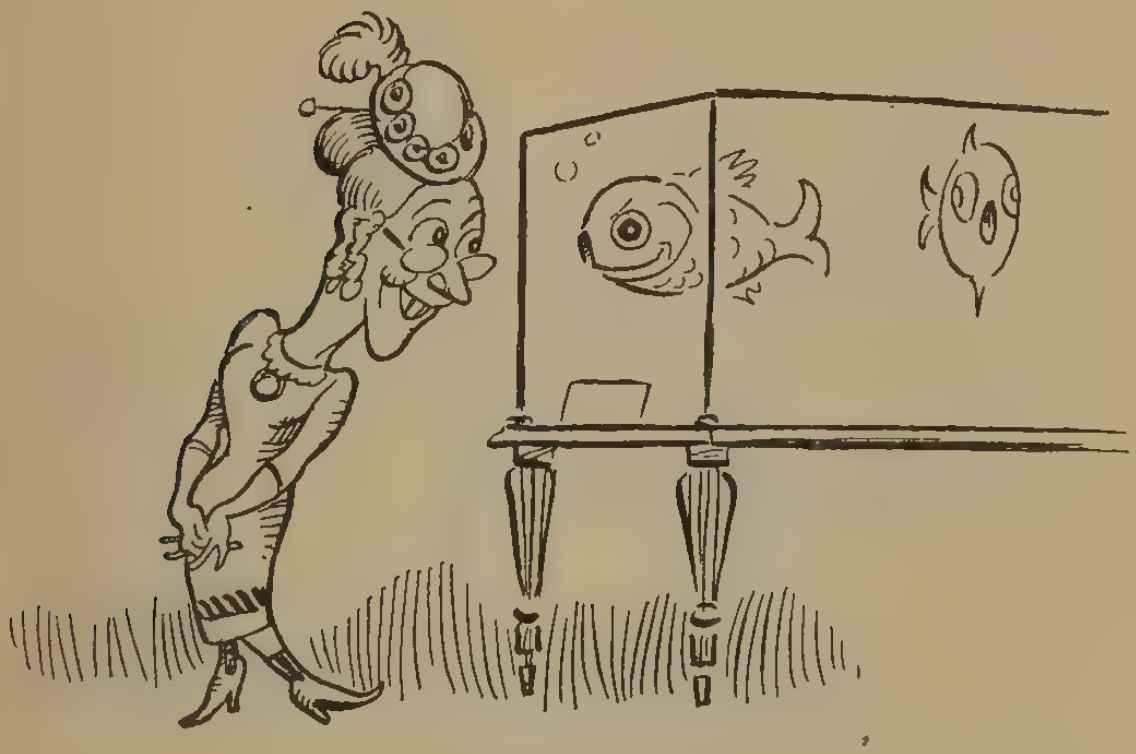
Yet 'twas a sinister affair :
She guessed what his intentions were !

Aunt Geraldine was in a tram ;
A smart and handsome-looking stranger
Remarked : " I beg your pardon, ma'am,
But aren't you Mrs. Wanger ? "
Though this she had to contradict
She realised that she had " clicked."

All types admired my Aunties' grace,
As I have ample means of proving :
Policemen (a romantic race)
Implored them to " keep moving,"
And cabmen, paid their legal fares,
Would try to follow them upstairs.

Theirs was a quality most rare
That caused not men alone to cherish
Their secret passions for the pair ;
Even the beasts that perish
Intuitively seemed to sense
My Aunts' magnetic influence.

Once, at the Zoo Aquarium,
Aunt Flo was ogled by a gudgeon !
Though she was somewhat overcome
And left the place in dudgeon,



When afterwards she told the tale
She always said it was a whale.

Meanwhile Aunt Geraldine had strayed
  Away to commune with the camels,
And such tremendous friends she made
  With all the Lesser Mammals,
The keepers grew alarmed, indeed,
Fearing their charges might stampede.

Yet life was not one ceaseless round
  Of light and amorous excursions ;
For lucid intervals they found
  More serious diversions ;
One Aunt would botanise all day,
The other loved to sing and play.

Aunt Flora roamed from sea to sea
  And blithely ranged the whole world over
Collecting *umbelliferæ*,
  Trifolia (or clover),
Arundines (or water-reeds)
And other wild and savage weeds.

Nothing escaped her eye or nose ;
  She knew, by instinct and from practice,
Exactly where the stinkwort grows
  And where the *epipactis ;*
She knew when groundsel bloomed at Rye
Or sorrel in the Isle of Skye.

Though oft, alas ! some rarer plant
  May to a false conclusion trick us,
No doubtful specimens had Aunt
  Within her *hortus siccus*,
Except one questionable rape
Which experts said was an " escape."

Aunt Geraldine, I should explain,
  To indoor sports was better suited ;
Her vocal chords she loved to strain
  (Though begged to have them muted)
Producing swanlike siren-notes
More tuneful than the mountain-goat's.

Her art was totally self-taught ;
  She'd learnt to sing without assistance,
But connoisseurs who heard her thought
  She might go any distance.
Her *collatura* was so good
That many of them hoped she would.

She often practised half the night
  (Until her landlord raised the rental),
Learning to read and sing at sight
  Those ballads sentimental
Whose wide appeal can never die :
" Unless ! " " Because ! " " Until ! " and " Why ? "

Singing in tones that soared above
  The chatter of her friends assembled :
" Come, live with me and be my love ! "
  Till all the weaklings trembled,
Their fears she'd afterwards allay
With : " Take, oh take those lips away ! "

One summer at the Wigmore Hall
  She gave a Spanish song-recital.
The " house " was most select, though small—
  One lady (with a title)
Purchased a ticket for the pit
And sent her cook to sit in it.

The music-critic of the *Mail*
  (Who also ran the Football Pages)
Said that a voice so elfin-frail
  Had not been heard for ages.
He only left before the end
Because he had to meet a friend.

* * * *

Aunt Geraldine has now become
  So famous she holds singing-classes ;
Aunt Flora with her *vasculum*
  Is still collecting grasses ;
And each, intent on weed or song,
Is happy as the day is long.

Aunt Flora finds *compositæ*
That no one could imagine grew so ;
Her sister sings " Abide with me ! "
Till nobody can do so.

Where either goes sweet concord flows
And deserts blossom as the rose.

V

BROTHERS

I'VE got three elder brothers—
Carruthers, Hulse, and Blair—
Though each unlike the others,
All three combine to share
That brotherhood of sterling worth
Which binds the brave of all the earth.

For Hulse is a physician
Who lives in Harley Street,
A mine of erudition
Wherever doctors meet
To plan a fresh increase of fees
Or launch some new but fell disease.

'Twas he who first enacted
That invalids are bound
To have their teeth extracted,
However strong and sound;
No remedies will he concoct
Until they've had their tonsils docked.

He views with disapproval
  Those patients' futile pleas
Who chafe at the removal
  Of their appendices ;
He better knows than they, no doubt,
What organs they can do without.

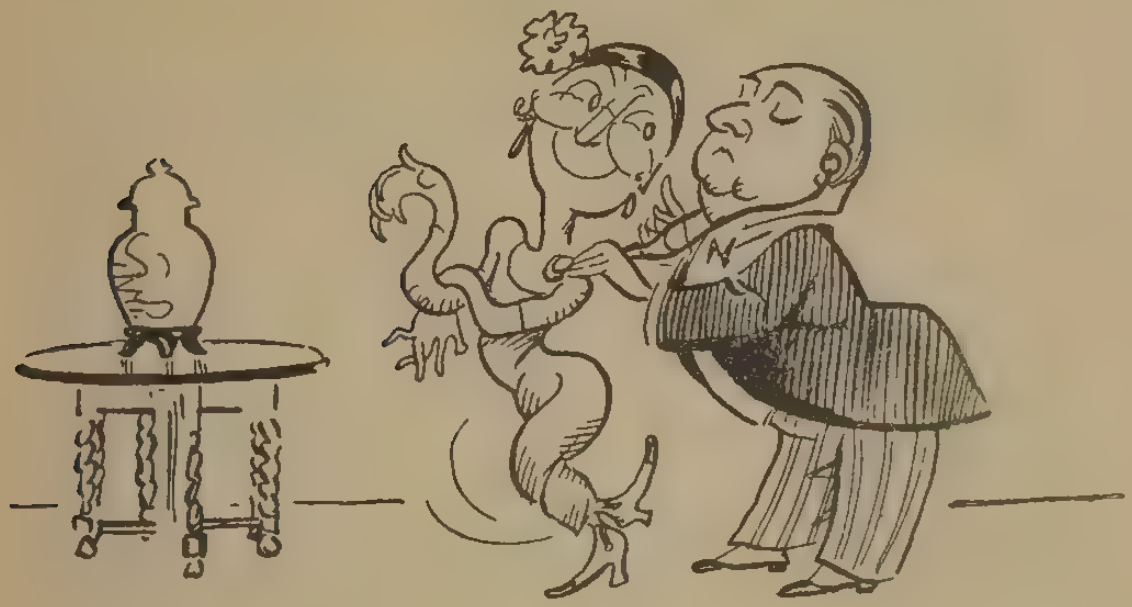
At inquests his position
  Commands so much respect,
He's cleared of all suspicion
  Of culpable neglect ;
Much social kudos, too, he wins
From signing Royal bulletins.

And when, in consultation,
He speaks in glowing terms
Of self-inoculation
And pathogenic germs,
His diagnosis does one good,
However little understood.

His patients he advises
With such extreme finesse;
He psycho-analyses
Each complex they possess
And, versed in pharmaceutic lore,
Prescribes " The Mixture As Before.'

And, when he feels their pulses,
The eyes of women shine
As, gazing into Hulse's,
They murmur : " Ninety-nine ! "

Each spinster's heart beats high with hope
Beneath his ticklish stethoscope.



He quells with pill or plaster
  The rarest ailments known,
Yet one is still his master,
  And sadly he must own
That he would give his weight in gold
To cure an ordinary cold !

The second of my brothers,
Of whom you must have heard—
I mean, of course, Carruthers :
His name's a household word—
Has long adorned the London stage,
The best *jeune dernier* of his age.

Each Sunday night performance
That highbrows organise
For plays (distinctly " warm 'uns "
At which the Censor shies),
Provides him with a fitting part
For his peculiar form of art.

He shines in those productions
In suburbs in the West
Which cause undoubted ructions
In ev'ry Bishop's breast
And keep, to groundlings' great delight,
Lord Chamberlains awake at night.

Yet I am never jealous
Of laurels he may gain ;
The actor's life, they tell us,
Is one long nervous strain,
Condemned for months on end to speak
The selfsame lines eight times a week !

Indeed, the thought is cheering
That while *I* dine in peace
Carruthers is besmearing
His face in paint and grease ;
To him, while *I* recline at ease,
The call-boy cries : " Beginners, please ! "

For I should feel a certain
But natural distaste,
Standing before a curtain
And bowing from the waist
To audiences so unkempt
One *must* regard them with contempt.

Yet 'tis a great Profession
Which furnishes those rôles
In which men find expression
For what they call their souls,
And, if successful, earn more pelf
Than the Prime Minister himself.

* * * *

I've little space to mention
My eldest brother, Blair,
Who draws a naval pension
And dwells in Thurloe Square ;
I can but briefly catalogue
The virtues of this old sea dog.

At Admiralty parties
He hitches up his slacks,
Exclaims " Heave ho, my hearties ! "

And slaps defenceless backs
With what his friends admit to be
Incorrigible bonhomie.

Regarding with impatience
  Our milk-and-wat'ry ways,
He deems the League of Nations
  A faddist's futile craze;
A whiff of grape-shot is *his* cure
For all the woes that men endure.

He views with irritation
  Each alien breed and creed;
Religious toleration
  Is not his *forte*, indeed,
And he would make the shortest work
Of Jew and Infidel and Turk.

Where his verandah faces
  The Oratory spires,
The quarter-deck he paces
  With zeal that never tires,
And gazes through his telescope,
In case he should espy the Pope.

He calls all Frenchmen " lubbers "
Because they owe us francs ;
He stamps as " money-grubbers "
Those proud but tardy Yanks
Whom we are privileged to pay
One hundred thousand pounds a day.

All modern art and letters
He simply cannot stick ;
He went to see " Our Betters "
And said it made him sick ;
And at " The Vortex," it's a fact,
He left before the second act !

He read, but couldn't finish,
The popular " Green Hat " ;
He thought its plot was thinnish,
Its moral worse than that,

And swore that he would love to strike
Its author with a MArlenspike !

Van Gogh, Césanne, and Tchekov—
  Their work does not impress ;
He vows he's wrung the neck off
  A shipmate for far less,
And looks with ill-concealed disgust
On " Rima's " epilepstein bust.

So angry, too, he's made by
Jazz tunes or Scriabine's,
He loathes to hear them played by
The Band of the Marines.
" God save the King " (that " tiresome air ")
Is good enough for brother Blair !

VI

SISTERS

"*ACH, SCHWESTERHEIT! Durch Ewigkeit*
Ursprung von allen Glücken!"
As Schiller was inspired to write
(In terms that may to-day sound trite)
To Herzogin Nichtspucken,
Showing how well he understood
The subtle charms of sisterhood.

A sister's love, his works attest,
Was fully as inspiring
To Ollendorf, whose interest
In things sororal he expressed

By constantly enquiring :
" *Où est le Jardin de ma Sœur ?* "
A veritable *cri de cœur !*

I, too, esteem and highly prize
The intimate connexion,
The tender consanguineous ties,
Of sisters whom I idolise
With brotherly affection,
Whose presence, since I was a boy,
Has proved a constant source of joy.

Elaine, the elder of the twain,
Who married Lord Strathbisquhey[1]
—He died from water on the brain
Which, so at least his friends maintain,
Was more than three parts whiskey—

[1] Pronounced Strabisky, with the 'k' soft, as in "knout."

Is known to the unprejudiced
As a confirmed philanthropist.

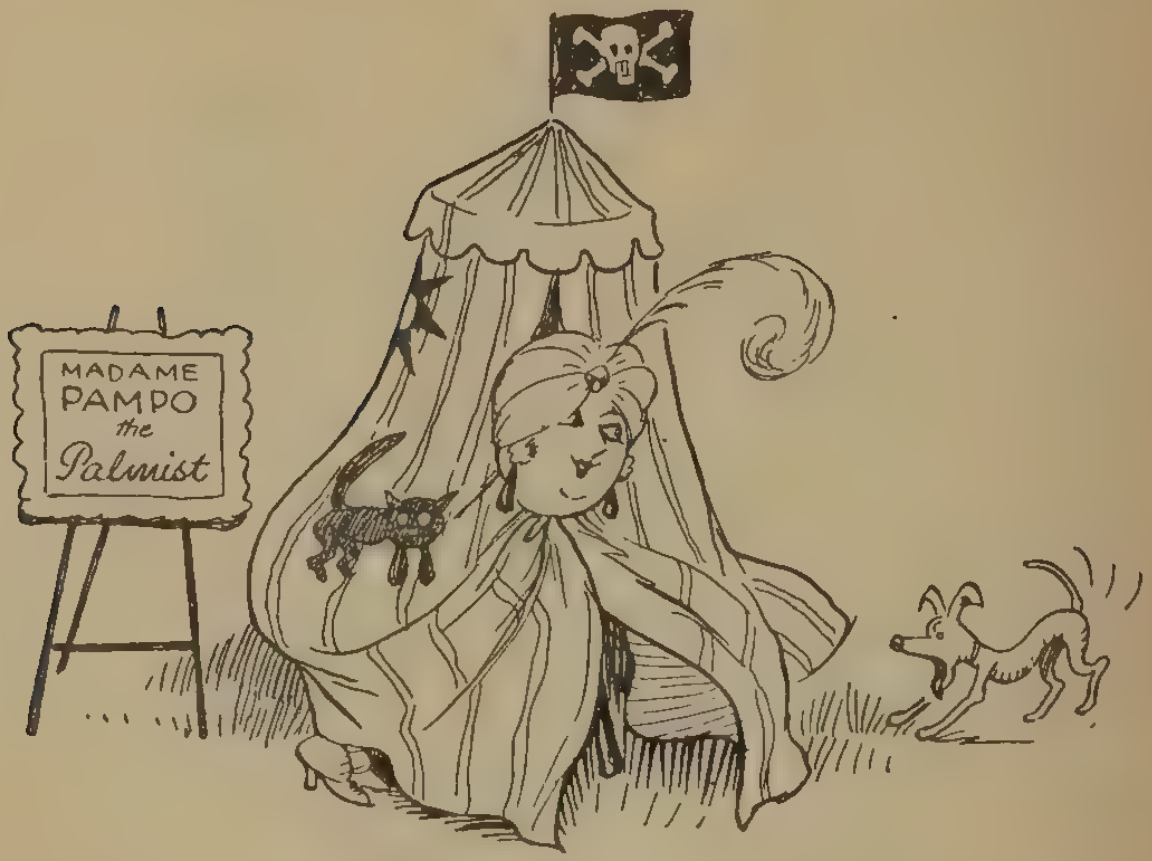
At Charitable Matinées
  She does the programme-selling ;
At garden Fêtes for Waifs and Strays
She runs the Roundabouts, the Maze,
  The tent for Fortune-telling ;

And afterwards, with ready wit,
Explains away the deficit.

At Pageants, too, she proves her pow'rs,
  All knotty points she settles
While chilled spectators sit for hours,
Regardless of the April show'rs,
  In beds of stinging-nettles,
To watch her ride across the park
As Good Queen Bess or Joan of Arc.

Last season, at the Albert Hall,
  How graceful people thought her
When, in a gay Red Indian shawl,
She graced the " Hiawatha Ball "
  As "Laughing Barleywater,"
And thus, in spite of her disguise,
Acquired the Consolation Prize.

Her presence at a Country Fair
With lustre must invest it ;



How nobly, too, she takes the Chair
At meetings to provide Fresh Air
For children who detest it,
Or, for recipients of the Dole,
Those baths in which they keep their coal.

There's not a doubt she's most devout ;
  She fills collecting-boxes
With funds for sending Missions out
To tell poor Chinamen about
  Their sad unorthodoxies ;
With what success is more than clear,
Since they converted three last year.

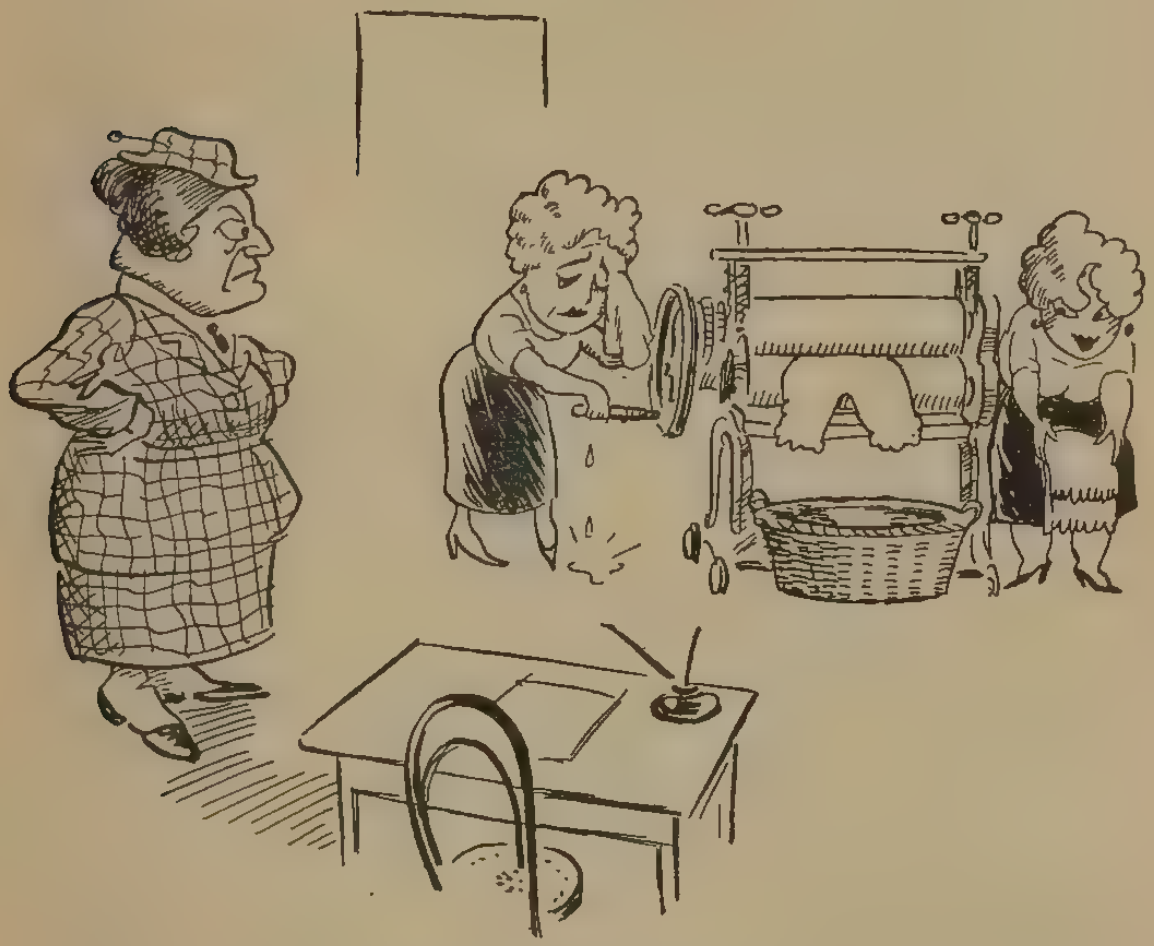
To help the Vicar she'll preside
  At ev'ry Mothers' Meeting ;
She raised a fund, last Whitsuntide,
To tune the organ and provide
  The church with Central Heating,
Installing ('twas a longfelt want)
Two radiators near the font.

Down at her home, Strathbisquhey Grange,
  The choir, beneath her training,
Acquired such width of vocal range,

Producing sounds so weird and strange
And yet so entertaining
That week-end guests, so people say,
Who came to golf remained to bray.

The Bishop of the local See
She readily persuaded
To have four hymns, instead of three,

That Providence might rightly be
  Still further serenaded,
And larger congregations throng
To Mattins and to Evensong.



With Homes for Girls who've Gone Astray
  She's proved a benefactress ;
The inmates work ten hours a day
But, though the life is far from gay,

How many a budding actress
Has thus been rescued, in despair,
From sumptuous flats in Grosvenor Square !

Alas ! she could not thus control
Her younger sister, Beryl ;
She gravely feared that, on the whole,
The latter's bright immortal soul
Was frequently in peril,
For Beryl, as one can't deny,
Is—well—a social butterfly !

Attracted, so we must confess,
By ev'ry lighted candle,
Dear Beryl is no governess ;
Her name has figured in the Press,
Connected with a scandal
Which many readers may recall,
Although 'twas not her fault at all.

For when she'd married Percy Blurge,
In spite of all our pleadings—
The man had no excuse to urge
Except that he was on the verge
Of bankruptcy proceedings—
And he had squandered all her cash,
She realised that she'd been rash.

Small wonder, then, if soon she found
Another soul-mate waiting :
A young instructor (since renowned)
Who volunteered to help her round

When she was roller-skating.
This led, alas ! to a divorce ;
But they were married in due course.

Her present husband's more than kind,
Yet not exactly thrilling;
For though he's thoroughly refined
(Which Beryl doesn't seem to mind)
He's sober, clean and willing:
And, since they hardly ever meet,
Their happiness is quite complete.

While *she* remains in bed all day
He's working in the daytime,
And then at night she drifts away
To restaurant or cabaret,
To dance and have a gay time;
To revel till the night-clubs close
With one or other of her beaux.

With these she proves so popular,
They welcome her with "Cheer-ohs!"
They see her coming from afar,
And there's no moaning at the Bar
When she puts in to Ciro's,
But such a cry—the band is drowned—
From all who aren't too full for sound.

She may be wrong, but who am I
To cast the primal granite ?
For still, as in the days gone by,
There's room for ant *and* butterfly
On this terrestrial planet.
No doubt she's " fast," she flirts, and paints,
But, dash it, we can't *all* be saints !

VII

SONS

I'M lucky to possess a son
And, what is more, an only one,
Who is (or so it seems to me)
Exactly what a son should be :
In manners, character, physique,
Peerless, a paragon, unique !

I never shall forget my joy
Hearing my firstborn was a boy.

Off to the Club I flew with pride,
To spread the good news far and wide,
To tell my fellows what I'd done
And how I had achieved a son.

From group to group the tidings flew,
And members whom I scarcely knew
(Or knew too well and couldn't stand)
Came up and shook me by the hand,
Showing a keenness quite intense
To drink my health (at my expense).

And, as they passed the story round,
The Lounge re-echoed with the sound;
Their sympathetic laughter woke
Our Chairman, old Lord Basingstoke,
Where, full of honours, years, and lunch,
He slumbered, in the throes of *Punch*.

Up in the Card-room, when he heard
The news, poor Colonel Wembley-Byrd
Who'd made a weak " Three Hearts," for fun,
To find that dummy's hand had none,
Threw all his cards upon the floor
And vowed that he would play no more.

While, in the so-called Silence Room—
A spot of inspissated gloom—
Two members (wellknown clergymen)
Flung down *La Vie Parisienne*
And, with suppressed and tactful mirth,
Discussed the Miracle of Birth.

My oldest friend, Sir Choldondeley Chubb,
Who was the doyen of the club,
Recalling happier days, long flown,
When he had children of his own,
Described how hard they'd been to bear
And what a perfect curse they were !

And Bishop Bulge, that great divine,
Who always used a little wine
And quoted, as his Pauline plea,
I. Timothy v. 23;

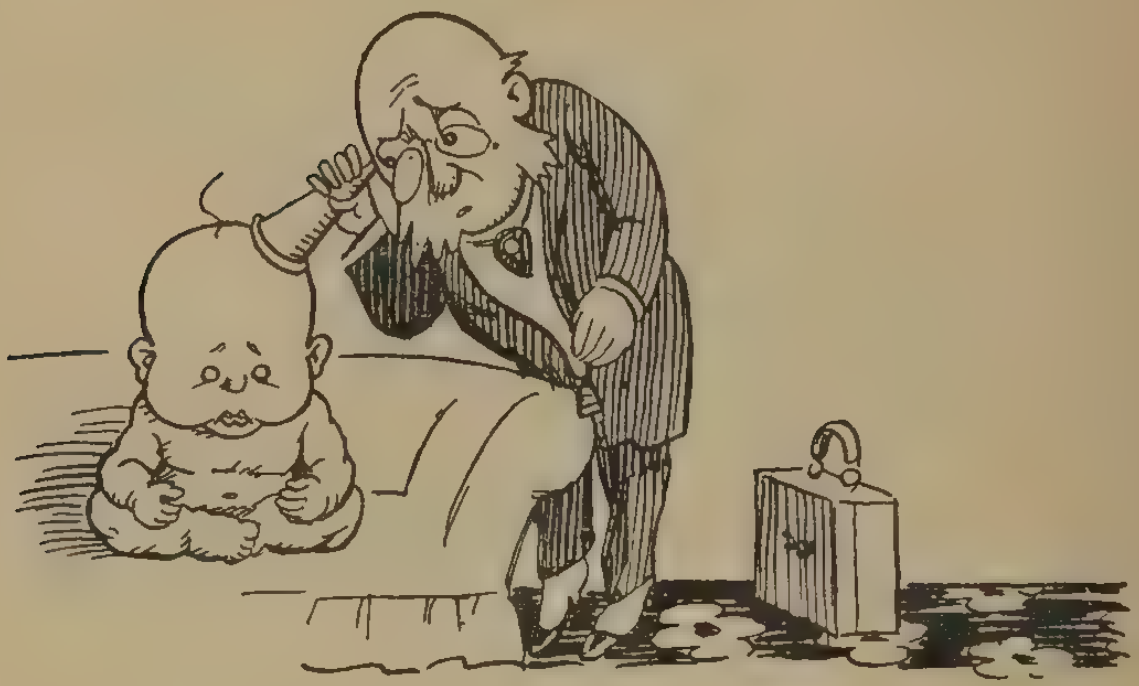
Toasted my offspring in a quart
Of Pillby's Convalescent Port.

While young Lord Urick Overdraught
(Son of the bankrupt Duke of Graft,
And quite the kindest man alive)
Urged me to lend him two pounds five
Because, as an old friend of ours,
He wished to buy my wife some flow'rs.

You mustn't think that *I'd* forgot
My baby's mother—surely not !
She, too, I knew, had done her bit,
And I appreciated it
And wished she had been there to see
The fuss those fellows made of me.

But when I woke her, late that night,
To tell her, as was only right,
The triumphs I had just enjoyed,
She seemed a little bit annoyed ;
My voice she begged me to subdue,
And not to wake Augustus, too.

Augustus was a sober child ;
For eighteen months he never smiled.
I grew alarmed about his brain,



But specialists who sought in vain
Some reason for this strange affair
Agreed they could find nothing there.

Still I was thankful when, at three,
He grew as bright as bright could be ;
At six he was so sharp and quick,
When shown a dog he'd cry " Tick, tick ! "
When birds across his vision flew
He'd point and say " Bow-wow ! " or " Moo ! "

And when, at ten, he went to school,
To Dr. Pelligrew's (near Poole),
He won respect and love as well
From all who fell beneath his spell ;
They said they'd never met a youth
With such a passion for the truth.

Not once but very many times
When other boys committed crimes
And masters vainly searched about

To try and find the culprit out,
His love of truth compelled my son
To point them out the guilty one.

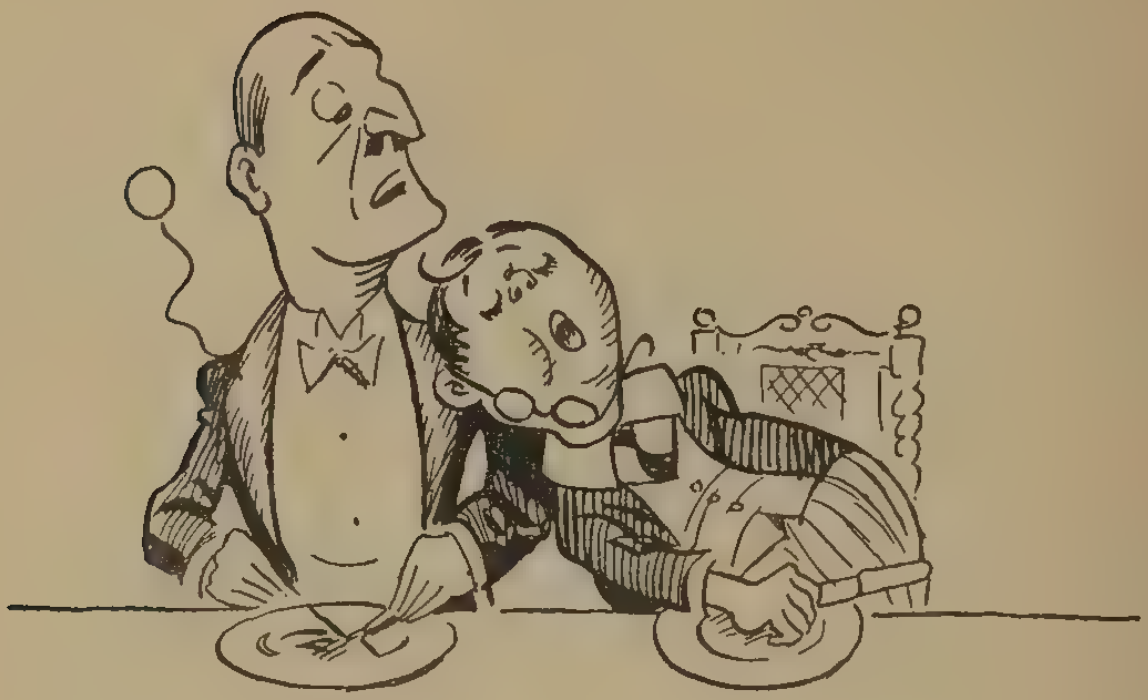
And so, though never good at games,
He earned those pet endearing names
Which boys confer with ready wit
On any local favourite,
As " Nosey Parker," " Mother's Boy,"
And " Skunk " and " Funk " and " Matron's Joy."

The public school where, later on,
His talents doubtless might have shone,
Proved to be far too rough and rude
For one who with aversion viewed
Those sports in which his fellows got
So very muddy and so hot.

Some people called Augustus fat ;
I wouldn't go so far as that,

For though his figure (which was stout)
Unfitted him to run about,
He could be graceful when he chose,
And quite gazelle-like in repose.

He over-ate at times, perhaps,
And after ev'ry meal would lapse



Into a kind of torpid doze,
Replete and almost comatose,
To wake refreshed and full of zeal
In time for the ensuing meal.

But though the friends who watched him feed
Accused him, now and then, of greed,
And often wished he wouldn't let
His mouth fall open while he ate,
Their criticism he'd disarm ;
They all confessed the boy had charm.

Augustus is at Oxford now,
And though by no means high of brow
He somehow has contrived to get
Into that fashionable set
Whose methods have enhanced the fame
Of Magdalen's once historic name.

His Fair-Isle jumper, I admit,
Though like a glove it seems to fit,
Upon Augustus, only serves
To emphasise those ample curves
Which even his admirers feel
It might be wiser to conceal.

Of course I know I'm prejudiced,
And yet the bracelets on his wrist,

The jewelled brooch that decks his chest,
Inspire me with a vague unrest ;
I often wish he wouldn't wear
A water-lily in his hair.
And though I feel a deep respect
For those young men of intellect

Who, scorning all the simpler sports,
Don broadbrimmed " bags " (instead of " shorts ")
And read, in a falsetto voice,
The earlier works of Mr. Joyce,

Or verses they themselves have made
Without, it seems, the Muse's aid,
I think the fashion overdone,
And when I see my only son
Beset by all these budding bards,
. . . I wish I'd put him in the Guards !

VIII

DAUGHTERS

WHEN Milton grew infirm and blind,
Like other fathers he expected
To find his daughters more than kind,
But they were selfishly inclined,
Their duties they neglected ;
With ill-suppressed exasperation
They wrote each night at his dictation.

For when, perchance, at 3 a.m.,
Some lyrical impromptu fired him
And he would gaily send for them
To copy out each verbal gem
With which the Muse inspired him,
They would record with smothered curses
His unpremeditated verses.

King Lear had daughters, I conclude,
Whose coldness to their sire was Polar ;
Their royal parent they pursued
With juvenile ingratitude
More sharp than serpent's molar :

Until he went right off his rockers
And played his part in knickerbockers.[1]

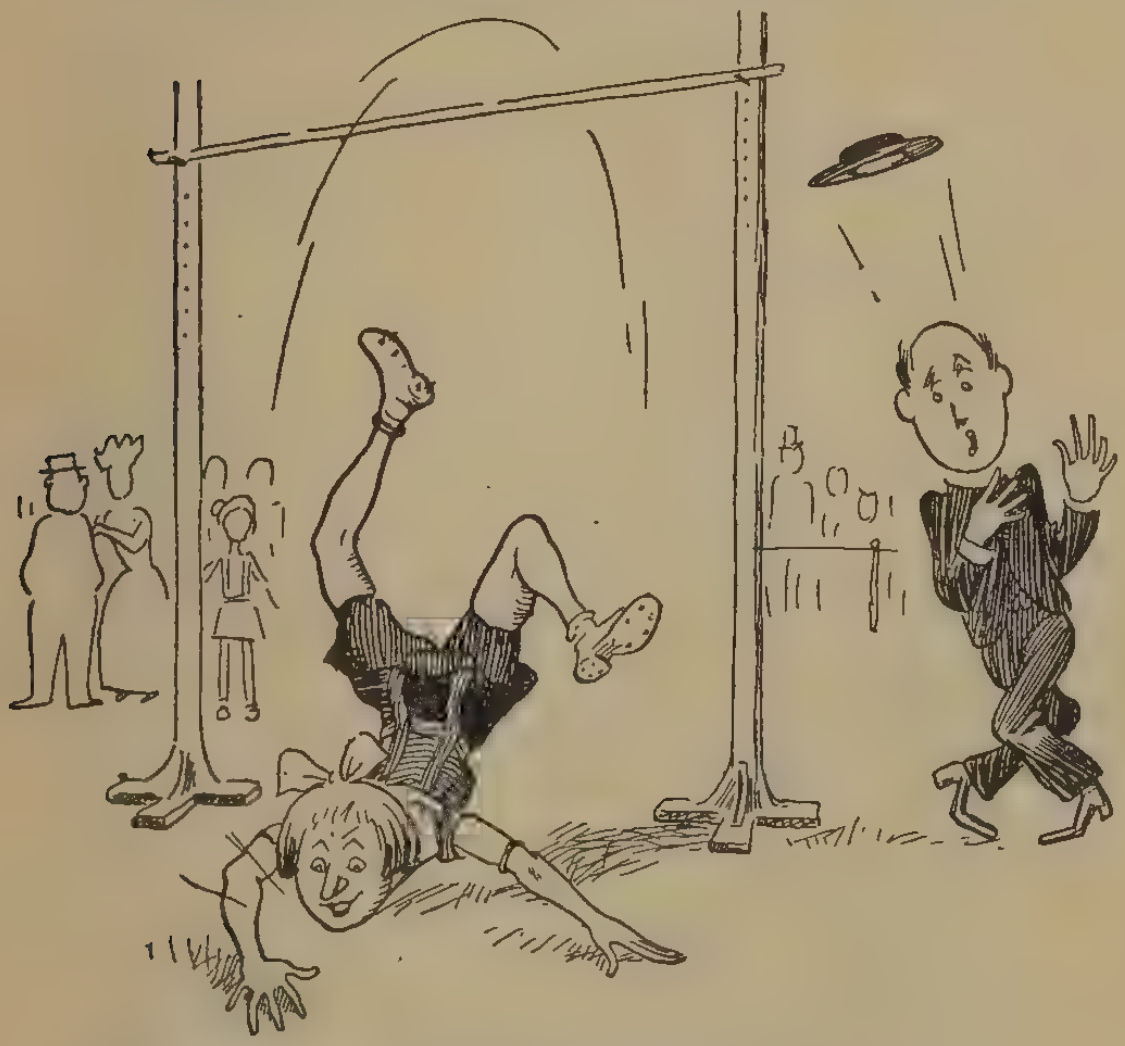
[1] Aren't you confusing him with Hamlet in "plus fours"?—PUB.
Very likely—H.G.

How pleasant, then, with truth to say
Of my two daughters, Joyce and Janie,
—Each perfect in her sep'rate way,
Though diff'rent, too, as night from day,
Yet both so bright and brainy—
That never since the world's beginning
Were there two girls so sweet, so winning.

If Joyce's nose, one must suppose,
Had been less large, her eyes much bigger,
Her cheeks more like the autumn rose,
Her teeth as white as winter's snows,
More like a sylph's her figure,
She might have been considered pretty.
(They weren't, which was perhaps a pity.)

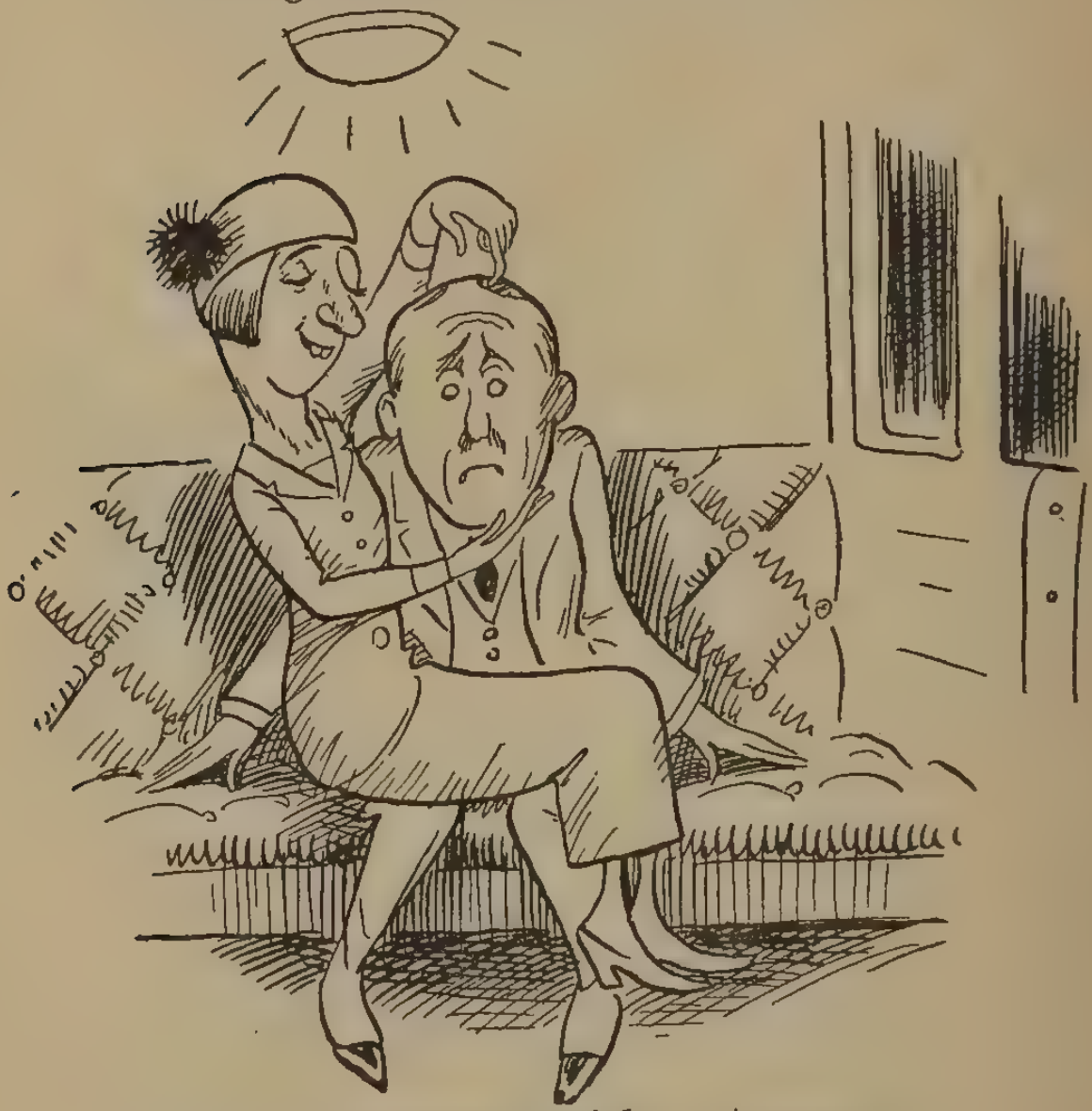
In form and feature she betrayed
That healthy passion for athletics
Which causes many an English maid
To scorn the adventitious aid
Of powder and cosmetics,
And so produces a complexion
Which seems to me to spell perfection.

Her hair was pale as driven snuff,
And though she wisely had abolished
The use of rouge or powderpuff,



Her skin was anything but rough—
In fact, so highly polished
That (like the sun on the Equator)
It almost dazzled the spectator.

But though she had undoubted charm,
The form it took was seldom active ;
Her parents never felt alarm
That she would come to any harm
Through being too attractive ;



In railway tunnels with a stranger
She wasn't in the slightest danger.

It was my constant joy, I own,
In which I secretly exulted,
To know that Joyce could roam alone
Without a maid or chaperone,
And never be insulted ;
She walked the streets that men infested
Comparatively ummolested.

Alas ! My second daughter, Jane,
If one may credit her confessions,
Seeks such immunity in vain ;
For her the men all entertain
Such passionate obsessions
That, day or night, they lose no chances
Of making amorous advances.

She says—though this might well escape
The notice of a mere observer—
That strangers, in their rage to scrape
Acquaintanceship in any shape,
Pursue her with such fervour
She feels the gravest apprehensions
As to their ultimate intentions.

At dances, too, one can't deny
That any man she deigns to fix with
Her basilisk, hypnotic eye
Lets all the other girls go by,
'Tis her alone he clicks with ;
While rivals in pathetic poses
Stand round with dislocated noses.

But though she has a host of friends
And wooers, eager and attentive,
With whom she spends the long week-ends
In close companionship that lends
Additional incentive
To thoughts of—well—of holy wedlock,
Matters have reached a kind of deadlock !

Dear Jane, of course, is no coquette—
Her methods no one could disparage—
But none of her admirers yet
(Save one who did it for a bet)
Has asked her hand in marriage.
When it's a question of the altar,
Their resolution seems to falter.

Bringing the conversation round
To wedding-bells and orange-blossoms
Is useless, as she's always found ;
Her lovers merely go to ground
(Like rabbits or opossums)
At any hint or mere suggestion
That they might wish to pop the question.

With Joyce, as with her sister Jane,
Romance has never reached fruition ;
Her partners, who perforce complain
That no physique can stand the strain
Of so much competition,
Acquire a weakness that is spinal
And scratch before the ante-final.

* * *

Still, doubtless Providence knows best,
And with two girls so sweet, so clever,
We parent-birds are doubly blest ;
Our fledglings won't desert the nest,
They'll stay with us for ever !
This makes the future far less arid.
Meanwhile, I hope they'll both get married.

IX

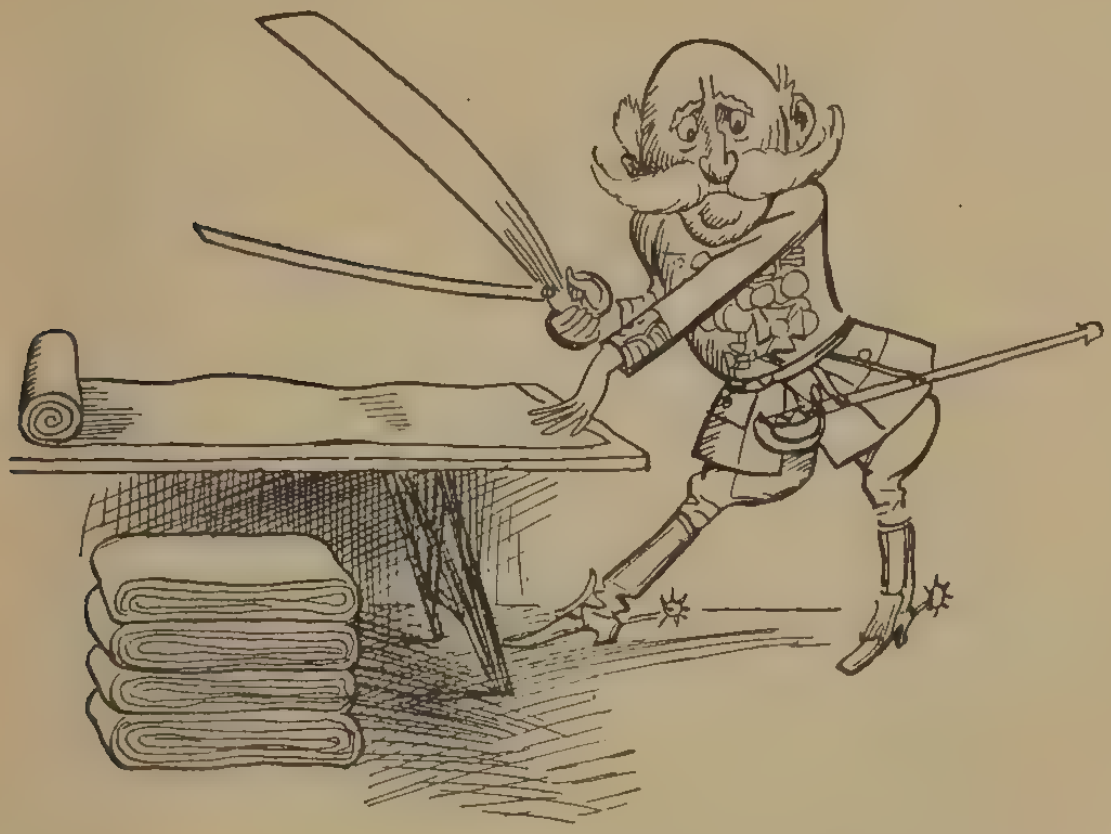
COUSINS

I WISH I had the time and space—
And this were quite the proper place—
To give their pedigrees, and trace
Through countless generations
The histories, too little known,
Of many cousins of my own
Who seem to me to stand alone
Among my near relations
As samples of that Bulldog Breed
Which England stocks for hours of need.

My cousin George was such an one :
In war-time did he fear the Hun,
The blasting bomb, the gas, the gun ?
He scorned their distant thunders !

The cruel seas might foam and writhe,
So debonnair was he, so blithe,
No Landing Officer at Hythe
Contrived to do such wonders !

His zeal on Army Clothing Boards
Won him the O.B.E. (with swords).



How popular in peace-time, too !
The rich—especially the " new "—
And those whose blood had once been blue,
Though now a trifle faded,

With George would daily love to go
To little night-clubs in Soho;
And when (within a month or so)
  These haunts were duly raided,
He'd find another one, next door,
And so continue as before.

* * *

How diff'rent was my cousin Frank!
He had no reverence for rank;
It was appalling how he shrank
  From certain rich patricians
Who, since their advent from the East,
Were honoured guests at ev'ry feast
And (in Society at least)
  Held all the best positions.
He simply didn't seem to see
How useful they could be to me!

For instance, once, when asked to dine
With Moses, Baron Hamilstein,

He had the folly to decline,
For no apparent reason,

Except that he had chanced to hear
Tales of his lordship's past career—
Tales which, repeated of a peer,
  Almost amount to treason
And, even if they may be true,
Are only known to very few.

Another thing, I must confess,
That filled me with acute distress
Was Frank's appalling taste in dress,
  His rash sartorial daring.
Conventions he would frankly flout :
Why, once, I saw him go about
And *both* his socks were *inside out*,
  And ev'rybody staring !
(Though I, of course, was not to blame,
Imagine my disgust and shame !)

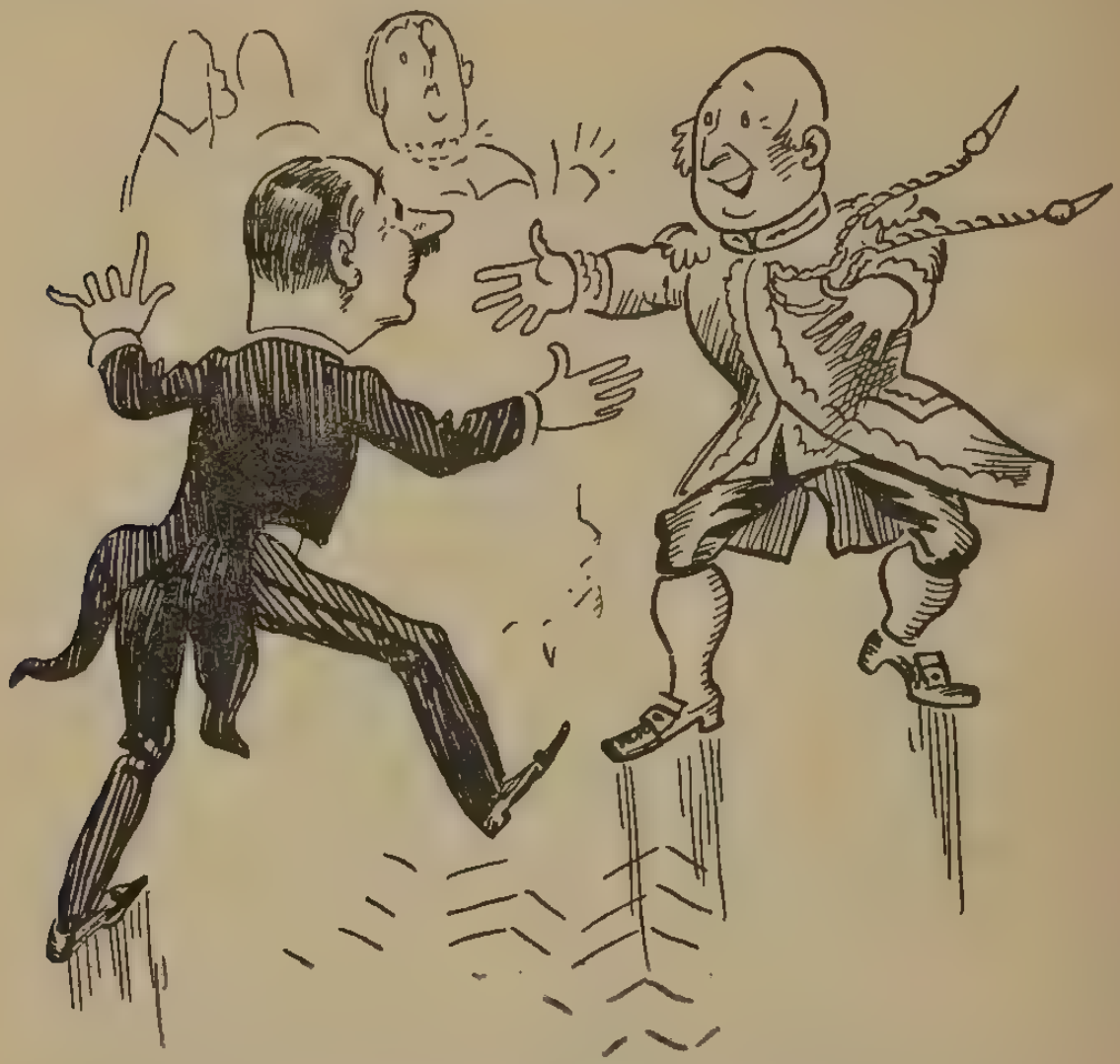
Another time, we went to play
A round at Prince's, Sandwich Bay ;
I wore my check " plus fours " that day,
  He came in old grey flannels !

O Death, I thought, where is thy sting ?
It really was a frightful thing
That any guest of mine should bring
  Discredit to our annals ;
And when I found he wore a belt
Instead of braces—what I felt !

Frank had good qualities, I know :
At Mons he won the D.S.O.,
And put up quite a gallant show
  In battles I've forgotten ;
But still, that doesn't quite excuse
The fellow's socialistic views—
The sort of friends that he would choose,
  To whom he seemed to cotton,
Were decent chaps, I'm bound to own,
But often poor and *quite* unknown.

'Tis said that Frank, when once he went
To stay with Lady Deal in Kent,
Forgot himself to the extent
  Of *shaking hands*, unblushing,

With John, the footman, who by chance
Had served with him somewhere in France,



Although his hostess looked askance
And fellow-guests were flushing!
(He had to leave the house next day,
And John, of course, was sent away.)

* * * *

To brighter topics let us turn :
You would, I know, be glad to learn
About the cousin known as " Ern "
  (Though " Ernest " he was christened)
Who, as a poet of some note,
Would (after he had cleared his throat)
Delight to read the things he wrote
  To anyone who listened ;
And often (for he wrote a lot)
To some who candidly did not.

" Free verse " it was, of course, though I'm
Quite sure that if he'd had the time
He could have made it scan and rhyme
  And look a trifle neater ;
But modern poets, as one knows,
Prefer to write what reads like prose—
Just sentences arranged in rows,
  With no regard for metre ;
And only we old fogeys plan
To make our verses rhyme *and* scan.

(Ah, me ! How vainly, week by week,
For lyric freedom do we seek !
Enslaved by fetters of technique
  We long for greater licence.

Condemned to search for rhymes to " babe,"
Sentenced for ever to hard lab.,
Only our duty to our neighb.,

Of which we've such a high sense,
Brings comfort in this dull and drab age
Where there can be *no* rhymes to " cabbage " !)

When Ern's first volume "*Frankincense*"
Was published (at his own expense)
The sale, I own, was not immense ;
  Few folks could understand it.
But in his next book, "*Episodes*,"
He pictured (in some striking odes)
The private love-affairs of toads,
  And, when the Censor banned it,
A hungry public flocked to get
Signed copies (at three guineas net).

At once my cousin sprang to fame ;
The papers echoed with his name,
And quite the fashion it became
  To sound his panegyrics.
In Chelsea boudoirs the élite
Would sit on cushions at his feet ;
The ladies thought him too, too sweet,
  And listened to his lyrics ;
The men sat stiffly round in rows
And yawned discreetly through the nose.

But oh, I never shall forget
The day that Frank and Ernest met !
I was most terribly upset,
  As all his friends were, *that* week.

Ernest was sitting in his car,
Inhaling an immense cigar,
When Frank cried : " Hullo, Ern, what *are*
You doing here in Rat Week ? "
I can't recall what Ern replied :
'Twas something terse, but dignified.

* * * *

The years have passed (as years must pass) ;
My cousin George, as bold as brass,
Is still beloved by ev'ry class,
Both Gentile and Semitic ;
While Ern, who soon forsook the Muse,
Writes plays which Managers refuse,
And works upon the *Morning News*
As chief dramatic critic ;
But as for what's become of Frank . . .
I must confess my mind's a blank !

X

IN-LAWS

IT seems to me a crying shame
That humorists should all disparage
Those worthy persons whom we claim
As relatives by marriage,
Who have been pilloried so long
In ev'ry so-called "comic" song
That audiences never pause
To think, but greet with loud gu'ffaws
All ribald jokes about "in-laws."

I always view with deep distress
The rude and vulgar illustrations
In which the minor comic press
Makes fun of those relations
Who stimulate the married life
Of many a happy man and wife,

Whose constant presence should invest
Existence with an added zest
And make each union doubly blest.

I recollect, in days gone by,
When courting my *inamorata*,

A backward, timid swain was I
  Who needed a self-starter :
And yet her people were so kind
They wouldn't let me change my mind ;
  And though they knew I was no " catch "
  'Twas they who kept me to the scratch
  And practically *made* the match.

The mother of my *fiancée*
  (Who had six daughters then unmarried)
Would lightly laugh my qualms away,
  And all objections parried.
She pushed us in each other's arms,
And raved about her darling's charms,
  Making a comprehensive list
  (Including sev'ral that I'd missed)
  Till I no longer could resist.

As for my dear one's father, he
  Was just as tactful as her mother ;
He'd always leave us, after tea,
  Alone with one another.

Locking the door, with some remark
About how "lovers love the dark,"
He'd turn the gas off at the main ;

And I would sit for hours with Jane
Trying to light the stove again.

My loved one's sisters (she had five)
Behaved in as discreet a fashion,
And did their best to keep alive
Our oft-times waning passion.
Before they entered any room
In which, amid sepulchral gloom,
The chilly pair of lovers sat,
They'd knock their loudest rat-a-tat
Or cough outside upon the mat.

After we married, my "in-laws"
Would give advice (how well-intentioned!)
And point us out the obvious flaws
In any plans we mentioned.
We'd seen a flat, but in Mayfair,
And they preferred Cadogan Square,
And, as they'd taken pains to choose
Some furnished rooms there in a Mews
We couldn't very well refuse.

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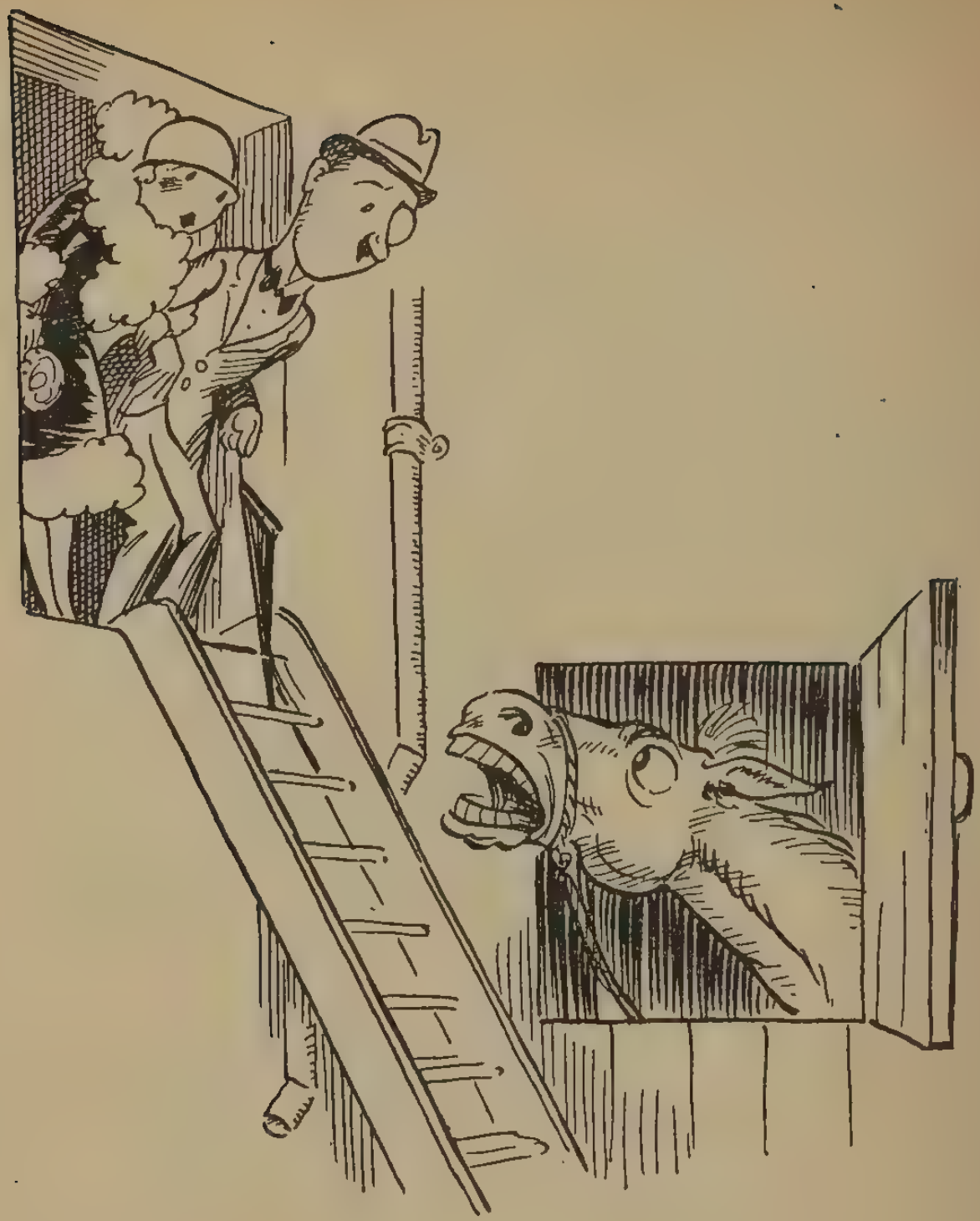

When first I set up house with Jane
Her parents were of great assistance ;
They never viewed me with disdain
Or kept me at a distance.
Her father came, without a fuss,
Three nights a week, to dine with us ;
Her mother, with maternal zeal,
Appeared at ev'ry other meal,
And quite at home they made us feel.

They chose the carpets and the chintz,
They bought the curtains (with our savings),
Replaced my set of Baxter prints
With Marcus Stone engravings ;
And ev'ry day, when we were out,
They'd move the furniture about
And rearrange our little nest,
And though at times we might protest,
We knew, of course, that they knew best.

And when our tiny firstborn came
Their loving-kindness quite nonplussed us
We'd chosen " Henry " as his name,
But they preferred " Augustus " :

And, later, though we'd wished to call
His sister " Mary "—not at all !
In this we were allowed no voice,
For they'd already made their choice,
And she was duly christened " Joyce."

I'd meant Augustus to be schooled
Where I myself was trained (and beaten !)
But this his Grandpa overruled—
He " didn't hold with Eton ! "
For Joyce a governess we'd planned,
But this by Grandmama was banned ;
And neither would be quite content
Till Joyce to boarding-school was sent
And off the boy to Oundle went.

* * * *

My wife has brothers, charming men,
Who never seem to need inviting ;
They know they're welcome in my den,
And when I'm busy writing
They very often condescend
To sit with me for hours on end,

Explaining how I'd make it pay
By doing what I do to-day
In some completely diff'rent way.

Their sisters, whom I love so well,
Delight me with their girlish chatt'ring
They use my house as an hotel,
Which is extremely flatt'ring.
It's really very nice to feel,
If *one* pops in to snatch a meal,
Another's on the telephone ;
My wife and I are bound to own
We're never lonely, or alone.